



## **DRA**

*Division of Ratepayer Advocates  
California Public Utilities Commission*

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### **CPUC Becomes State's Video Franchising Authority; DRA Given New Advocacy Responsibilities for Video Customers**

“The Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006,” recently signed by Governor Schwarzenegger, shifts the video franchising authority from local governments to the California Public Utilities Commission. The Legislature’s purpose for this shift was to “Promote the widespread access to the most technologically advanced cable and video services to all California communities in a nondiscriminatory manner regardless of socioeconomic status.”

With this centralization of franchising authority, The Division of Ratepayer Advocates of the Commission was given new advocacy responsibilities. The Legislation states that DRA “shall have authority to advocate on behalf of video customers...” at the Commission. Specifically, DRA is directed to defend the interests of video customers at the time of franchise renewals, and in the enforcement of provisions of the law having to do with assuring non-discriminatory service, consumer protection standards, and the prohibition on rate increases for residential, primary line, basic telephone service until January 1, 2009.

Since the Commission is required to start accepting applications for state video franchises “no later than April 1, 2007,” DRA anticipates working closely with the Commission as it develops procedures for processing applications in the short time-frame provided by the Legislation.

Dana Appling, DRA's Director, noted: "The new law provides that the Commission has only 30 days to decide whether a state franchise application is complete. After that, the Commission has only 14 days to issue the franchise. If these deadlines are not met, the application is automatically approved. This gives other parties, including local governments, limited time to have any input. We hope the Commission makes the process as transparent as possible."

Director Appling added: "There are many unanswered questions about how this process will work over the long-term. As the line between telecommunications services and video services and internet access blur with new technologies, consumer advocacy must adjust if ratepayers are to be protected when new providers deploy services increasingly essential to California's economy."